

Administration Department
NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE
1133 Broadway
New York City

MEMORANDUM

February 13, 1953

TO: ADMINISTRATION FILES

FROM: R. Maurice Moss,
Associate Executive Director

RE: Conference with Mr. David McDonald, President,
United Steelworkers of America - February 9th.

I went to Pittsburgh on February 9th per prior arrangement to see Mr. David McDonald, President of the United Steelworkers of America. He agreed to see me at 2:30 P.M. and we met promptly at that hour. I had drawn a few notes from which I made the presentation to Mr. McDonald, further pointing out that when I had first asked for the conference, at the time of the CIO convention in Atlantic City, our purpose then had been primarily to give him information as to our interests and activities in Bucks County. I further pointed out that we had been in constant contact with the local officials of his union in that area; that they had been very cooperative; and that I wished him to understand from the beginning that my visit was in no sense to complain about the relationships which had obtained. Since the interview was first sought, however, there had developed some problems that could be tackled by us only if we had USW's understanding, and also its active help.

At this point, I sketched briefly the Urban League's activities in Bucks County, including the visit of our Board-Staff committee on November 18th, and then showed him our memorandum which had been transmitted to the company and Mr. Hood's reply. Mr. McDonald's immediate reactions were amazement that the company officials would give so eminent a committee as we had carried to Bucks County such an impolitic brush-off and, second, that they would put in writing certain statements which could be so easily refuted. In the latter connection, he pointed out that there were many Negro members of USW employed by U.S. Steel in grades above sixteen, which grade a company official had indicated in the conference with Messrs Thomas and Pope was the lowest grade being recruited for the Fairless plant.

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At this point, Mr. McDonald telephoned Frank Shane, Secretary of the Civil Rights Section, to ascertain the highest rating of Negro personnel known to Mr. Shane off-hand. Shane immediately replied "grades 23 or 24"; thereupon Mr. McDonald asked him to join us in the conference and repeated to him our conversation to this point. A few moments later he asked Elmer Malloy also to join us. Also, Mr. Sweeney was in the room for part of the time.

Being aware that this was Mr. McDonald's first day at his desk in over a week, I had indicated in the beginning that I thought our conference could be handled in fifteen minutes, but at this point McDonald pushed other business aside to extend the discussion because he obviously felt that Mr. Hood's letter had serious implications for the union as well as the Urban League. He pointed out that the figures used in the letter applied to employment in Carnegie-Illinois division only, which did not give the total picture. But in a sense these were the better figures to use since transfers would normally be made from within that division to the Fairless plant. However, it was pointed out further that Tennessee Coal and Iron in Alabama is part of the Carnegie-Illinois setup and that approximately fifty percent of its employees, many of them highly skilled, are Negroes. Another interesting point made by Mr. McDonald was the fact that he could not have told me from union records how many Negroes are employed by U.S. Steel and had been under the definite impression that the company itself maintained no such figures. The exact totals, given in the letter, indicated that either such records are kept or that a careful study of the situation had been made prior to responding to our memorandum.

I pointed out that we had begun our approach through our concern about housing but had quickly come to the conclusion that it was necessary to concentrate on employment; that the Urban League was not willing to admit that in the total of more than 17,000 Negro employees no one was eligible for transfer or, being eligible, that none had requested transfer. I further expressed it as our belief that if the statement, that no single Negro had asked for a transfer is correct, then the corporation has apparently not encouraged such requests. This was an area in which USW could be helpful to the League by joining us in seeking out eligibles and either through its own resources, or through the Urban League, initiating some requests for transfers.

The union officials pointed out some of the obstacles to be overcome in this process; namely, that while all other accrued benefits are retained, job seniority is lost when a person transfers from one plant to another. However, the union officials

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also joined me in thinking that the opportunity to transfer to the Fairless plant might be particularly attractive to eligible Negro workmen in certain of the U.S. Steel plants located in areas in the South. It was agreed that they, too, had a responsibility to take a careful look at the question of up-grading and of the inclusion of non-white workers in office forces, personnel departments, etc. Our discussion finally led to a promise of full cooperation on the part of USW with the Urban League in following through on the several areas considered, and the responsibility was placed in the hands of Mr. Shane with the understanding that he would immediately contact other union officials who could be helpful. Specifically mentioned in the latter connection was Boyd Wilson who has worked with the Urban League on other projects in the past.

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Following the conference in Mr. McDonald's office, Mr. Shane, Mr. Malloy and I talked for another 45 to 50 minutes in the outer office. These two men repeated that there were many Negroes working as first helpers in the open hearth furnaces, generally with grades of 23 and 25. (I later discovered from other sources that at least one Negro first helper in the Dusquene plant is in grade 25 and is considered the best first helper in the area.) Second helpers are rated at grades 15 and 17, and it was the opinion of Messrs Shane and Malloy that this group, hopefully, would request transfers since second helpers in all of the older plants might well desire the opportunity to become first helpers in the Fairless plant and, by upping their classification, compensate for loss of plant seniority. It was also pointed out that once Fairless Works begins to operate at anything approaching capacity there seems little doubt that work at Dusquene and Clairton will be reduced. This is also true of Ellwood. If there should be serious curtailment, first helpers would also be available although most of them would not want to move. Many have as much as 25 years seniority and receive considerable in incentive pay.

Keepers in blast furnaces are rated at grade 14, and approximately one-half of the persons in this classification in the Dusquene area are Negroes. In TCI all of them are Negroes and are rated in grade 14 there also. There are Negro employees as heaters in a few instances, and these are grade 14.

Finally, the union men repeated again their astonishment that the company had precise figures on the number of Negroes employed and that they would admit this in writing. They expressed the belief that their first approach should be to U.S. Steel officials below the executive level to try to ascertain their reactions. Mr. Shane and I agreed to exchange copies of our memoranda concerning these sessions and to check with each other on any item on which our understanding seems not to be the same.